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## **MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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**Afghanistan 2012 and Beyond:**

**Clearing, Holding, and Building with Transition Teams**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

**By**

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Afghanistan 2012 and beyond: Clearing, Holding, and Building with Transition Teams.

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**Thesis:** As the US prepares for and begins to execute a transition of responsibility to the Afghan government, Military Transition Teams, if made the priority of effort, offer a viable solution to boost the effectiveness of the COIN strategy.

**Discussion:** As of June 2011, the United States (US) is preparing to transition total responsibility of governance and security to the Afghan government. In order to make the transition smooth, the US should follow its doctrine outlined in Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24). One dilemma the US will face is the struggle between following doctrine and seeking fast results in just two years. FM 3-24 provides a prescriptive process for clearing, holding, and building in a country experiencing an insurgency, and thus if followed, can continue to be effective. The flaw with the COIN campaign in Afghanistan is that, from the beginning, the US has not followed its own doctrine. With time running out and support from the American people in decline, it is incumbent on political and military leadership to follow doctrine and allow Military Transition Teams to finish the COIN campaign.

**Conclusion:** If the US does not reduce its footprint in Afghanistan and allow Military Transition Teams to work as the main effort, the COIN strategy, as currently being implemented, has potential to continue indefinitely. Following military doctrine requires an estimated 672,000 troops and currently, Afghanistan is roughly 274,000 troops short. With the decline of support for the war, the likelihood of public support for adding forces is zero. Therefore, Military Transition Teams offer the only realistic force density and mission to continue with a COIN strategy.

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## **Introduction**

The threat of insurgency challenges the United States military because two of its dominant characteristics--protractedness and ambiguity--mitigate the effectiveness of the American military.<sup>1</sup> Insurgencies are difficult for any country to contend with because of the multitude of problems they present. Army counterinsurgency doctrine, Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24), defines an insurgency as an “organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control.”<sup>2</sup> Doctrine states that when an insurgency begins, the Host Nation (HN) Government is challenged to figure out why the insurgency is happening and what to do to resolve the problem.

The current strategy being applied in Afghanistan, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), is being executed as a Counterinsurgency (COIN). For almost ten years, the United States (US) has used large, conventional armies to target insurgents while simultaneously using Military Transition Teams (MiTT) to build the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). However, with 120,000 US personnel deployed to Afghanistan and ANSF that is, as of November 3, 2011, comprised of 290,000 army and police personnel, the COIN strategy, as applied, struggles to demonstrate real progress.<sup>3</sup> As the US prepares for and begins to execute a transition of responsibility to the Afghan government, Military Transition Teams, if made the priority of effort, offer a viable solution to boost the effectiveness of the COIN strategy.

## **United States Counterinsurgency Strategy**

The Department of Defense defines Counterinsurgency as a “comprehensive civilian and military effort taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.”<sup>4</sup> Before COIN

strategy can be successfully executed, the problem must first be defined. In Afghanistan the problem is how to win the hearts and minds of the population. One method for solving such a problem is application of a theory that Carl Von Clausewitz describes as a “paradoxical trinity.”<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz’s theory explains that the government (policy makers), people, and military are constantly pushing and pulling against each other; thus, any solution must maintain a balance between the government, people, and military. Successful application of the trinity in Afghanistan would be for the government of Afghanistan to clearly articulate what the goals are and then apply its indigenous security (military) effort, with the backing of the Afghan population, towards achieving those goals. However, given the time already spent in Afghanistan, the constant changes of command and rotation of troops, the nearly one trillion dollars spent, the ineffectiveness of the Afghan government, and the lack of results to show, one can conclude that the COIN strategy is not working as intended.

One of the major criticisms against staying in Afghanistan from those who oppose the war is that the mission is simply armed nation building.<sup>6</sup> In a 2010 interview, Dr. David Kilcullen, a recognized expert in counterinsurgency who helped General David Petraeus write the Army doctrine for counterinsurgency, states that Counterinsurgency takes upwards of 15 years to fight.<sup>7</sup> He cites the shift in focus from Afghanistan to Iraq in 2003 as a major contributing factor to the poor results in Afghanistan. Upon completion of the war in Iraq, the US shifted focus back to COIN in Afghanistan. Based on General Petraeus’ perceived success in Iraq, the same concept should have been applied in Afghanistan of stepping back and allowing the Afghan government to take responsibility for security.

## **COIN Effectiveness**

Since 2001, the US has been taking a lead role in conducting a COIN campaign against the Taliban on behalf of the Afghan government. This approach is ineffective because the US has limited backing of the Afghan population, does not have a clear endstate, is losing the support of allied partners, and the Host Nation (HN) government and population is growing impatient.<sup>8</sup> President Obama stated in June 2011 that all US combat troops will be withdrawn from Afghanistan by 2014, indicating that the timeframe for military operations in the COIN campaign to be successful is nearing.

Reports in the media also show that support from the American people is declining. For example, a poll conducted by Cable News Network (CNN) in October 2011 showed that only 34 percent of the public support the war.<sup>9</sup> Vice President Joe Biden and other high level government officials also continue to state publically that the COIN strategy is not working and needs to be further narrowed in scope.<sup>10</sup> As support for the strategy itself continues to decline, conventional wisdom says the Afghans are unwilling to fight or finance their own counterinsurgency because the US is doing it for them.<sup>11</sup>

The Department of Defense (DoD) and commanders in Afghanistan are struggling to sell the strategy to top political leadership because time is running out, and successful COIN requires an indefinite amount of time. As recently as February 2012, the new Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, stated that combat operations in Afghanistan will end in 2013, approximately one year earlier than previously reported just eight months earlier by President Obama. The National Security Strategy (NSS) published in 2010 does suggest that the US is still in Afghanistan because extremists still exist with the intent of harming US interests around the world, but all indications are that it is time to move on from the COIN campaign in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

With mixed messages from the White House and apathy of the Afghan government, the pressure is on commanders to expedite the COIN strategy. One problem that prevents commanders from moving quicker towards transitioning to ANSF is that the definition of success in Afghanistan is difficult to define. In 2009, for example, the commanding general of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), General Stanley McChrystal, released an assessment that stated conventional North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Afghanistan were ineffective. His comments exemplify that the US cannot force the local populace to believe what outside forces want them to believe; the only feasible exit strategy is the development of competent, indigenous security forces.<sup>13</sup> General McChrystal's comments were based on the 2006 strategy of using MiTT to train ANSF to a level that would allow US security operations to be reduced and US focus shifted toward the population.

A recent guest lecturer at the Marine Command and Staff College stated that in order for COIN to be successful, the leadership has to identify the insurgency quickly and, within the first year, start to turn the tables. If this is not done properly, it is very difficult, although not impossible, to make COIN work.<sup>14</sup> In OEF, the insurgency was not identified for three years, and it has been seven years trying to train and encourage the ANSF to take responsibility and secure their country. By Afghan standards, their forces are very effective. Recent polls of Afghan civilians suggest 70% of Afghans see their army as effective.<sup>15</sup> The majority of the populace has confidence today that their ANSF can maintain an acceptable level of security.

### **Strategic Challenges**

A major challenge for the COIN strategy in Afghanistan is the defined endstate. The US must make clear whether its approach to counterinsurgency is one of victory or containment.<sup>16</sup>

Victory requires that the HN assume responsibility for its country and be received by the population as legitimate. However, beginning in 2006, when the Department of Defense (DoD) decided to emphasize training an indigenous security force as the main effort towards a successful transition, no one could have foreseen how difficult it would be to train ANSF to execute an effective counterinsurgency strategy. As a result, the question was answered for the policymakers; it was a strategy of containment. Training the ANSF and thus leading to a transition has been slow, expensive, and fraught with setbacks. The COIN strategy outlined in Chapters Five and Six of FM 3-24 requires a more advanced local indigenous force than what troops on the ground experienced in Afghanistan. Several problems quickly became apparent once a seemingly simple strategy was implemented.

The first challenge with COIN in Afghanistan is that the Afghans are not following the prescriptive path of FM 3-24. United States doctrine repeatedly identifies the HN as critical for a successful COIN campaign, and the sooner the HN can function without unacceptable degradation, the better.<sup>17</sup> In Afghanistan, the ANSF are not providing the level of security they should, even though US MiTT continue to advise them. The Afghan government itself is arguably the largest obstacle. President Harmid Karzai continues to prove his administration is out of touch and not committed to promoting democracy. The Afghan government is corrupt, and while coalition troops continue to fight and try to maintain security, President Karzai is disengaged towards working for a peaceful democracy or ridding his administration of corruption.<sup>18</sup>

Counterinsurgency relies heavily on the perception of the government by its people. In many societies, the military is seen as an extension of the government. If the government of Afghanistan is viewed by the people as being corrupt and not serving them, then the likelihood

of the ANSF not being accepted or supported is increased. FM 3-24 clearly states that “the primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government.”<sup>19</sup> The result of a negative perception of the HN government is a prolonged COIN campaign, one that very possibly may never end.

The second challenge is the ANSF and how the US is handling them. Mr. Haider Mullick, a recognized expert on counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan, stated in an interview with this author that the ANSF need to be allowed to “get a bloody nose” in battle while the US is still present. It will produce casualties, but it will make them a better, more confident fighting force.<sup>20</sup> In order for COIN to be successful, the US must step back and allow the ANSF to be tested in combat. In COIN, the population does not have to like the government backed forces, but they do need to respect them and generally accept that the government is acting in the population’s best interests.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, and possibly the greatest challenge with COIN is the variable of time. Even though, based on numbers alone, the ANSF are more than capable of showing presence to the population, they fail to do so, and time is running out. Counterinsurgency requires patience, the kind only an indigenous government will have, because the center of gravity is the population. The fight for the hearts and minds of the population is expensive in terms of time, resources, and cost.<sup>22</sup> The strategy of winning the people rather than focusing on killing the enemy has cost, as of June 2011, \$19 billion dollars. Much of that money has disappeared with little or nothing to show, according to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>23</sup> One could argue that after ten years of war in Afghanistan, a majority of military goals have been accomplished. The COIN doctrine clearly articulates in Chapters Five and Six that a gradual decline in NATO presence is essential to any hope of making COIN a success.

## **Doctrine is Good – Execution is Bad**

As the US prepares to transition security of Afghanistan to the ANSF, one dilemma the US faces is the challenge of conducting the COIN strategy right, in accordance with doctrine, or fast. As discussed earlier, COIN is a long term process and offers few expeditious resolutions to problems. Proper COIN strategy requires an investment of time, something the US does not have. However, after ten years of effort, one cannot effectively argue that the US has not stayed the course. Therefore, it is prudent for the political and military leadership to realize COIN can still be the long term strategy, but the results will not come quickly, certainly not in two years. Attempts to expedite the COIN strategy creates a disconnect between following the US doctrine and seeking a faster solution to the security problems in Afghanistan. Clearly, the best approach is to follow the doctrine outlined in FM 3-24.

The method described in FM 3-24 is to clear, hold, and build in a nation plagued with insurgents. According to FM 3-24, clearing is a “tactical task that requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance in an assigned area.”<sup>24</sup> During this phase, all insurgent forces should be removed from the area. Clearing operations are kinetic with a conventional force and presents’ the highest potential for casualties and collateral damage.

Once an area is deemed clear, the next step is to hold the area gained by successful clearing operations. Holding an area means the amount of insurgent activity is greatly reduced and the HN forces have the advantage, capable of responding to new threats. When HN forces establish a foothold in a clear area, they are then able to live among the population and further disrupt and eliminate local insurgents.<sup>25</sup> During this phase, it is imperative that the host government continue to establish control and provide basic services for the population. A corrupt

or inept government will prevent further progress and thus slow the process of reaching the final phase of building.

The final stage is to build. During the building phase the HN forces must protect the populace by continuously conducting patrols and using measured force against insurgent targets.<sup>26</sup> The HN government must provide basic services such as clearing roads, digging wells, building further security forces, and providing basic community infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting at this time that FM 3-24 does not offer a timetable to explain how long the clear-hold-build approach should last.

In order for the clear-hold-build approach to be effective, there must be a HN security force ready and capable to assume control as soon as possible. Counterinsurgency doctrine suggests that US forces should allow the HN to implement its own practices that are in accordance with the country's customs and courtesies. In Afghanistan, the continued use by the US and its allies of a conventional force complicates the mission of allowing HN forces to hold areas on their own.

Advising is not a new concept for the US military. The premise behind advising HN forces is that the US military can share its expertise with developing armies. Serving as trainers or advisors is part of clear-hold-build outlined in Chapter Five of FM 3-24. Further complicating matters in Afghanistan is that the US has not followed its own doctrine of clear-hold-build, transitioning to HN forces as soon as possible. Instead, a large, conventional, occupying force of over 120,000 personnel continues to conduct kinetic operations across Afghanistan in the name of COIN strategy.

Army FM 3-24 identifies the clear-hold-build concept as sequential, not simultaneous.<sup>28</sup> In other words, a force should not continue to clear while hold or build operations are occurring.

Furthermore, the tasks associated with holding and building should be done by the government of Afghanistan, yet the US continues to have a lead role in clearing operations where ANSF are attempting hold and build operations. This approach is counter to doctrine outlined in FM 3-24.

The challenge in Afghanistan with the clear-hold-build strategy is that the ANSF are not being allowed to assume the lead. As discussed earlier, commanders are hesitant to relinquish responsibility of the ANSF. Currently a large conventional force of approximately 120,000 troops, thousands of pieces of combat equipment, large operating bases, aircraft, and DoD civilians is deployed to Afghanistan. The HN security force must show a presence, conduct patrols, and offer a sense of security to the local population. Furthermore, Chapter Six of the COIN manual says that a large force of international participants is both helpful and hurtful to the development of security forces.<sup>29</sup> It is helpful because it provides enablers to make the developing force better, but it is hurtful because those same enablers prevent the indigenous force from being seen as legitimate.<sup>30</sup>

To further exemplify the disjointed execution of COIN in Afghanistan, the troop density can be explored. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates there are approximately 30 million inhabitants, as of June 2011 and projected for June 2012, in Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> According to FM 3-24, in order for COIN to be effective “20 counterinsurgents for every 1,000 inhabitants” is the minimum.<sup>32</sup> If one follows this formula, there should be a combined force of HN and coalition forces with a total combined force size of 672,200. The most accurate calculation of ANSF forces available, on paper as of November 2011, is 290,000.<sup>33</sup> NATO estimates the number of troops deployed to be approximately 130,386 total troops deployed.<sup>34</sup> These numbers combined equal a total of 420,386, a shortage of 251,814 troops. Considering the time already spent in Afghanistan and the declining support for the war, any attempt at increasing troop

strength to correctly execute the COIN strategy would be met with public and political resistance.

Since 2008, some progress has been made to emphasize the clear-hold-build approach, but the US continues to be in the lead, not forcing the ANSF to assume control.<sup>35</sup> The combination of an advisor force supported by a quick reaction force and medical support could support the Afghan government and build the confidence of the ANSF by forcing them to provide security for their population.<sup>36</sup> The US needs to follow its own doctrine and allow for long term success by accepting that the ANSF can execute COIN at a tolerable level, as opposed to the US executing the mission well.<sup>37</sup>

### **Military Transition Teams (MiTT)**

The success of COIN depends on the government taking responsibility and providing for its people.<sup>38</sup> The current COIN strategy has three problems: lack of Afghan support, failure of the US to follow its own doctrine, and degrading support for the war itself. There is no doubt that the US military is the best conventional fighting military in the world. However, in Afghanistan where ten years of conventional fighting an insurgency still has no real end in sight, a shift towards MiTT with specialized personnel, enablers, and equipment is necessary for a successful exit strategy. MiTTs, if employed properly, offer a viable option to continue supporting the ANSF and thus facilitating a transition in 2014.

Military Transition Teams generally have 10-15 senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and officers, usually majors or captains, with the mission to advise and train security forces of host nation countries in the areas of intelligence, communications, fire support, logistics, and infantry tactics (see Table 1).<sup>39</sup> Prior to 2006, there were a limited number of

trained personnel, usually from the Special Forces communities, who could successfully perform the advisory mission. Their training in culture and language was specialized to cover all facets required of being an advisor to a host nation military. MiTTs allow for a much smaller footprint and less visibility because the teams are small. Their ability to influence the area of operations through the ANSF is better than the alternative of using large conventional forces to restructure provinces because there are 150 militants.<sup>40</sup> Even commanders, at all levels, agree that MiTT require special training and skills to be effective.

In a COIN strategy, outside forces can negatively impact the gains in holding and building operations because kinetic operations can affect the views of the population. General Stanley McChrystal's assessment in Afghanistan focused on three areas of improvement. First, General McChrystal asserted there was too much focus on finding the enemy, and he agreed that the strategy should focus on the population. Second, his comments suggested that this population-centric COIN approach would be ineffective because the US forces being used were poorly trained in areas of culture and language.<sup>41</sup> Finally, General McChrystal assessed the situation in Afghanistan and realized conventional forces were ineffective because the mission of clearing was complete and the focus should be on holding or building.<sup>42</sup> In short, forces that are not directly advising or assisting the ANSF should be removed from Afghanistan; their presence undermines the effort.

In recent testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, Lieutenant General (Ret.) David Barno, a Senior Advisor for the Center for a New American Security, states “an effective ANSF will ultimately be the ticket for U.S. combat forces to come home from Afghanistan.”<sup>43</sup> He warns that “the overall U.S. advisory effort in Afghanistan today is fragmented, non-standard, decentralized and largely

lacking any bureaucratic power or centralized senior leadership.”<sup>44</sup> Afghanistan is not the first time MiTTs were used to train a military. It is, however, uniquely challenging because of the shifting strategy of the past ten years and culture of the Afghan population.

### **MiTT Way Ahead**

If the US can accept that the ANSF have reached a culminating point in terms of learning basic combat, then the focus of MiTT should shift to technical skills and development of a professional force as opposed to continuing to focus on ground combat type skills and constantly taking the lead for the ANSF. MiTTs are meant to act as advisors in both military tactics and development of a professional force (See Table 2). A professional military developed at the battalion level focusing on technical skills such as logistics, administrative procedures, and medical care is important. For this reason, battalion level and above MiTT can offer coaching, teaching, and mentoring to Afghan senior leadership. Accepting the advice lies in the purview of the Afghan Army, which must understand the necessity of performing missions without the assistance of US or other forces. Once complete, the Afghan National Army (ANA) is best suited to win the hearts and minds of the populace because they understand the culture far better than any other coalition partner.<sup>45</sup>

A considerable amount of time, since 2001, has focused on training the ANA in combat skills. Today, the ANA performance in combat continues to demonstrate that there is little to be gained by continuing to focus on tactical tasks. There is room, however, for MiTT to focus on technical skills and thus develop a more professional ANSF. The ANA know basic combat skills; they are the best option for winning the hearts and minds of the population, they understand the culture, and they are going to be the force of the future as OEF comes to an end.

Afghanistan does not require highly technical weapon systems or capabilities organic to a large conventional force.

Beginning now and beyond, the ANA should be the only force conducting kinetic operations. The US and NATO partners are best suited to providing support through agencies such as the Red Cross, USAID, and the State Department by providing the ANA with items to hand out to the population, but there should be no US forces with ANA as this takes place. As of March 2011, the ANA force of 160,000 providing security to an estimated population of 30 million means a 1:187 ratio of soldier to civilian.<sup>46</sup> One can see that without US forces, the ANSF are more than capable today of conducting all missions autonomously because of the size of their force. However, US troops continue to participate in humanitarian missions, and this participation detracts from demonstrating that the ANSF are capable of maintaining security for the populace.

The continued presence of a large occupying force impedes the development and urgency for the ANA to maintain security in Afghanistan. This is due to the fact that once the ANA are deployed to a combat zone, there are multiple enablers from the Coalition that prevent the ANA from being tested and thus prevent the ANSF from growing their confidence and capability. Military Transition Teams are definitely making an impact because the ANSF are continuing to take on more security missions once commanders are willing to relinquish responsibility. As discussed earlier, commanders remain hesitant to grant total responsibility for battle-space to the ANSF. However, if the US does not stop taking the lead in COIN and kinetic operations, then forces are likely to be there indefinitely and the gains made by MiTT could be lost.

There are four problems that prevent MiTT from being most effective. First, the selection of personnel to serve on a MiTT is not efficient. Beginning in the summer of 2006, then Army

Vice Chief of Staff, General Richard Cody identified the advisor mission in Iraq and Afghanistan as “the most important mission the Army has.”<sup>47</sup> At that time, there were an estimated 6,000 advisors manning 500 teams operating at all levels of command advising the Iraqi army.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most challenging problem facing the use of advisors in key positions is the admittance that personnel are not being properly utilized based on their military training or specialty. As late as 2008, the situation was not getting better. Teams continued to be manned based on a request for forces and improperly utilized to serve an advisor role. Multiple After Action Reports (AARs) from returning advisors indicated that a greater number of interpreters, logisticians, and administrative personnel were required to man MiTT. In one case, an individual selected as a mechanic deployed as a communications specialist.<sup>49</sup> This type of ad hoc assignment to MiTT continues to hamper the transition process. Effective MiTT must have individuals who volunteer for the position. The demands and requirement to work outside of one’s military specialty are a challenge. Many returning MiTT members indicate that the best advisors are those who are screened carefully to ensure their background fits with the job they are volunteering to perform.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, the demands of Iraq and Afghanistan simultaneously exhausted all the available personnel for MiTT and resulted in a shortfall of personnel to fill the requirements of MiTT.

The second problem with MiTT involves fatigue. MiTT are most effective during the build stage but are being used as force multipliers during the clear and hold stages. Traditionally, the advisor mission was kept within the Special Forces community because of the extensive specialized training for regions around the world. However, with continued deployments and alternating missions between Iraq and Afghanistan, the need to expand the mission became critical. By 2008 it was not uncommon to see an Army Captain who was on his third or fourth

deployment as an advisor, alternating between Iraq and Afghanistan. The continued rotation of advisors between the two countries resulted in a fatigued force.<sup>51</sup> In order to expand the mission, Army leadership began to look outside the talent pool of Special Forces and towards any Army soldier.

The third problem is the repeated misuse of MiTTs by commanders on the ground impedes their ability to be effective. In a recent Policy Brief released by the Center for a New American Security, Lieutenant General (Ret.) David Barno writes that “the coalition effort devoted to providing embedded advisors with Afghan combat units is fragmented and ad hoc, a practice dating to a 2009 policy change. Given the priority accorded U.S.-led combat operations, commanders have devoted few intellectual or material resources to advising Afghan combat units in the field.”<sup>52</sup> One example is a report released by the Coalition Joint Task Force 82<sup>nd</sup> (CJTF-82) in which they tout their lead from the front model in contrast to what other units are doing in Afghanistan. The report states:

CJTF-82 replaced ETTs and PMTs with coalition maneuver units linked directly to Afghan counterparts.<sup>53</sup> Replacing small Transition Teams with full-sized combat units introduced a completely different dynamic. Afghan units and leaders showed greater willingness to conduct operations, knowing that coalition forces were there in strength and ready to bring in fire support if needed. With ETTs/PMTs, the ratio of coalition to Afghan soldiers or police was 1:43 in many areas. Through combined action, that ratio became 1:4. In just 90 days, the percentage of Afghan-led operations increased 15 percent, the number of joint Afghan/coalition operations jumped 20 percent, and ANSF recruiting and retention showed strong improvement—a clear indication of growing confidence.<sup>54</sup>

This may very well seem like a success for the CJTF-82, but the long term impact only serves to create more reliance on US forces. Replacing the MiTT with a conventional force once again serves to undermine the COIN strategy as the way out of Afghanistan.

Another problem limiting the effectiveness of MiTT is their training curriculum for the ANSF. Skills that are required to train the ANSF are unique. There is little dispute that the ANSF are mostly illiterate when they arrive for training. The literacy presents a challenge that the MiTT must find a way to overcome. An estimated 86% of ANSF are illiterate, unable to read or write. According to the *Long War Journal: Afghan National Army Update, May 2011*, “An illiterate soldier cannot read a map, a training manual, or the serial number of his rifle. Specialized training such as medicine, logistics, and communications cannot be taught to an illiterate person.”<sup>55</sup> The best approach to combat this problem is hands on demonstrations of skills as opposed to briefing, lectures, and reading. The problem, however, with hands on approach is that it takes longer to train. With an illiterate student body, the ability to teach subjects in depth is limited. Because of the literacy problem within the ANSF, MiTT are constantly finding the balance of just how much impact western culture is going to have on the force. Extensive training in soft skills such as culture, language, medical, logistics, and administration are more valuable than kinetic skills. The ANSF consistently demonstrate their ability to conduct kinetic operations; ANSF know how to engage the enemy. It is all the other skills such as ordering supplies, maintaining equipment, and treating casualties the ANSF need to learn. These types of tasks do not require a kinetic force. They require patient individuals with backgrounds in logistics and administration who can teach the ANSF how to be a more professional and proficient security force.

MiTT can be more effective if commanders on the ground will allow them to perform only the mission they are deployed to conduct – to advise, not be a force multiplier or take the lead with an Afghan face on missions. Too often, commanders consider MiTT as sixteen additional personnel to conduct kinetic operations. If one considers that the average combat

vehicle requires at least three personnel to operate, a MiTT adds five additional combat systems to conduct presence patrols or act as Quick Reaction Force (QRF), as opposed to teaching ANSF how to order supplies. As the transition draws near, commanders should allow MiTT to perform their duties while requiring ANSF to take the lead in securing their country.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)**

Requiring the ANSF to take the lead for security operations will be a challenge. The Afghan culture is commonly perceived by US forces as apathetic and lazy compared to western civilizations. A common response from Afghans when asked to hurry up or move out quickly is “*Inshallah*,” which means God willing.<sup>57</sup> MiTT members realize this response usually means the mission may or may not happen and often get frustrated when trying to encourage ANSF to conduct operations. For these reasons, the effectiveness of a clear-hold-build strategy is greatly reduced because of a perceived lack of urgency within the Afghan culture. A MiTT that operated in the city of Qalat, Afghanistan often commented that the Afghan National Army soldiers did not want to conduct missions and often wanted team members to solve their problems for them. According to a 2010 U.S. Army Research Institute analysis of transition teams in Afghanistan (Technical Report 1264), “U.S. Soldiers struggled to understand their counterparts’ perceived lack of task organization. Soldiers were also frustrated by the host nationals’ tendency to place priority on activities that were perceived as ‘wasting time,’ such as drinking tea, eating, and conversing.”<sup>58</sup>

For an advisory mission to be successful, one has to consider how “trained” the force will be, and then set realistic expectations. One example of an unrealistic expectation is when the US fielded the M16 rifle to the Afghan National Army (ANA) in 2008. The ANA were accustomed

to the AK-47, a simple but inaccurate weapon that is cheaply made and requires very little to no maintenance. The M16, on the other hand, is more sophisticated and requires constant maintenance in order to function, but in return, is more accurate. It is not in the ANA culture to constantly clean their equipment and maintain it, yet the weapon was fielded and the training took much longer than anticipated.

The poor literacy rates and apathy of the Afghan National Security Forces further hinders the ability to apply an effective MiTT. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis recently returned from a one year deployment to Afghanistan. He wrote in an article “Truth, Lies, and Afghanistan” his assessment of the ANSF. According to Davis, the ANSF are not progressing and many of the American troops had nothing but contempt for the ANSF.<sup>59</sup> His article is controversial because it questions senior leadership’s honesty and the perceptions given to the American public about the progress of the ANSF. A MiTT that conducted operations with ANSF in Qalat, Afghanistan found that although the ANSF were difficult to train, when the ANSF conducted kinetic missions autonomously, they did surprisingly well. The MiTT reported that the only real assistance they provided the ANA was helping to build a professional Army instead of building skilled warfighters. Taking time to teach training techniques, logistics, and administrative skills were of the most value. Unfortunately, with only two years remaining, there simply isn’t enough time to fully and properly teach these skills to an illiterate force. MiTTs must patiently focus on demonstrating tasks.

### **Military Transition Teams or Conventional Forces**

Operation Enduring Freedom began with a strategy aimed at removing the Taliban government from power and degrading terrorist organization’s ability to launch attacks from

Afghanistan. During the initial phases of the war, *clearing* was easily the right mindset to have. If the concepts described in FM 3-24 had been followed, Afghanistan might look much different today. Instead, a simultaneous approach to clear-hold-build, while applying MiTT to advise and assist the ANSF has generated little success.

Currently there are over 100,000 US military personnel deployed to Afghanistan. Most of the personnel perform support roles to a limited number of actual combat troops. As units rotate into and out of Afghanistan, the ANSF continue to grow in size and equipment. Last year 11 billion dollars was spent funding the Afghan government. Although such a government and forces exist, Army and Marine infantry units continue to conduct clear-hold-build missions in the most dangerous provinces while the Afghans remain untested.<sup>60</sup> With the transition deadline approaching, it is imperative that the ANSF begin to take the lead as much as possible.

MiTT can be more effective because members are supposed to possess unique skills to train, advise, and coordinate with the HN forces. Their skills in collaboration, communication, culture sensitivity, and tactical specialties are precise and more specific to the theater in which they operate.<sup>61</sup> During the Qalat MiTT deployment, they found that when the ANSF were forced to conduct operations autonomously, the sense of pride and accomplishment among Afghan soldiers was high. In contrast, when large US formations with firepower and equipment conducted operations in the ANSF area, gains by the transition team were lost because conventional operations tend to undermine the MiTT effort.

## **Conclusion**

Shifting away from counterinsurgency with a large military footprint, and focusing on MiTT with limited kinetic operations, is the key to transition in Afghanistan. The ANSF possess

a competency that is tolerable enough for the US to transition the security and thus allow the ANSF to take the lead role for governance of the population. Military Transition Teams with the proper structure of personnel, operating at the battalion level and above with a focus on technical skills and building a professional army, are the best hope for a smooth transition from Afghanistan. As of January 3, 2012, the Obama Administration announced a leaner, more streamlined DoD that seeks to build on technology and smaller conflicts while maintaining the ability to apply a large conventional force for one war, not two. With these announcements and pending budget cuts, it is critical to transition from Afghanistan as soon as possible and let the ANSF take the lead to maintain security in their own country.

The US and its Allies can no longer fight the battle for the Afghan people; the Afghans must fight it themselves. FM 3-24 clearly states that the HN is the key to a successful COIN campaign. What remains in Afghanistan is a near term, in years, approach towards holding and building operations across the country. As the Afghan people grow their own security forces, without the help of the US, their country will be more secure. The United States cannot stay in Afghanistan forever, and senior military leadership cannot make an effective argument for staying past 2014. Repeating strategy shifts, firing generals, and maintaining a large force during a period of interwar and budget constraints is not realistic to an American public that is increasingly unsupportive of the war in Afghanistan.

Since the release of FM 3-24 in December 2006, the US military has attempted to apply the strategy of COIN in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the complexity of OEF appears to be beyond the reach of a COIN strategy. An argument could be made that Afghanistan is already lost and there is little hope of making much difference between now and 2014. In order for the COIN strategy to have even had a chance, the troop strength needed to be approximately 672,000

counterinsurgents since the beginning, and have a government free of corruption that worked to gain the support of the people. Instead, the challenges in Afghanistan have proven to be too much to allow COIN to be successful. Some of the challenges preventing COIN from being successful in Afghanistan are that the US does not follow its doctrine, the Afghan government is corrupt, the US is hesitant to transition security to the ANSF, there is not a clearly defined endstate, and the cost of COIN is mounting. As OEF enters its 11<sup>th</sup> year, a reassessment of the success of COIN should indicate that, as currently implemented, it's ineffective.

Finally, FM 3-24 outlines clear-hold-build with a whole of government approach as being a successful method to execute a COIN campaign. However, the Afghan government and people are not willing to embrace the concepts of COIN, resulting in clear-hold-build being moderately effective, for the coalition, in some areas of Afghanistan. Still, the US struggles to employ the right strategy and find its footing to facilitate a smooth transition to the ANSF. The coalition forces continue to perform kinetic operations in support of the government in Afghanistan. Beginning now and lasting until the last US combat force is out of Afghanistan, all kinetic operations should be the responsibility of the ANSF with little to no US involvement. As the US prepares for and begins to execute a transition to the Afghan government, Military Transition Teams, if made the priority of effort, offer a viable solution to boost the effectiveness of the COIN strategy.

**Table 1: Example of Battalion Level Transition Team<sup>62</sup>**

Role	Key Responsibilities
Team Chief (Major)	Leader of the team; coordinates subordinates' efforts; primary advisor to the Iraqi unit commander.
Staff/Maneuver Officer (Captain)	Second in command; primary advisor to the Iraqi unit's operations officer.
FA Effects Officer (Captain)	Coordinates the use of Coalition fires, i.e. artillery and close air support.
FA Effects NCO (Sergeant First Class)	
Intelligence Officer (Captain)	
Intelligence NCO (Sergeant First Class)	Assists Iraqi staff in developing and analyzing enemy information.
Logistics Officer	Primary advisor to the HQ service company on sustainment functions.
Logistics NCO (Sergeant First Class)	Assists in fielding new equipment and advises Iraqis on sustainment functions.
Communications NCO (Sergeant First Class)	Trains and advises Iraqis on communications and computer equipment.
Medic/Corpsman (Sergeant First Class)	Renders medical aid to injured team members and Iraqi forces. Conducts medical training for Iraqi forces.

**Table 2: Characteristics of an effective host-nation security force.<sup>63</sup>**

- **Flexible.** Forces capable of accomplishing the broad missions required by the host nation—not only to defeat insurgents or defend against outside aggression but also to increase security in all areas. This requires an effective command and organizational structure that makes sense for the host nation.
- **Proficient.**
  - Security forces capable of working effectively in close coordination with each other to suppress lawlessness and insurgency.
  - Military units tactically and technically proficient, capable of ensuring their aspect of national security and capable of integrating their operations with those of multinational partners.
  - Nonmilitary security forces competent in maintaining civil order, enforcing laws, controlling borders, securing key infrastructure (such as power plants), and detaining criminal suspects.
  - Nonmilitary security forces thoroughly trained in modern police ethos and procedures, and who understand the basics of investigation, evidence collection, and proper court and legal procedures.
- **Self-sustained.** Forces capable of managing their own equipment throughout its life cycle (procurement to disposal) and performing administrative support.
- **Well led.** Leaders at all levels who possess sound professional standards and appropriate military values, and are selected and promoted based on competence and merit.
- **Professional.**
  - Security forces that are honest, impartial, and committed to protecting and serving the entire population, operating under the rule of law, and respecting human rights.
  - Security forces that are loyal to the central government and serving national interests, recognizing their role as the people's servants and not their masters.
- **Integrated into society.** Forces that represent the host nation's major ethnic groups and are not seen as instruments of just one faction. Cultural sensitivities toward the incorporation of women must be observed, but efforts should also be made to include women in police and military organizations.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 89.

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<sup>17</sup> Army, 1-26.

<sup>18</sup> Barno, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Army, 1-21.

<sup>20</sup> Haider Mullick, conversation with author, March 20, 2012.

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<sup>22</sup> Kilcullen, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Wood.

<sup>24</sup> Army, 5-19.

<sup>25</sup> Army, 5-19.

<sup>26</sup> Army, 5-20.

<sup>27</sup> Army, 5-21.

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<sup>29</sup> Army, 6-1.

<sup>30</sup> Army, 6-2.

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<sup>48</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, 127.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, 131.

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